

Informational Testimony on House Bill 574

Good afternoon members of the committee. My name is Rolene Schliesman, I'm an architectural historian with 23 years of experience, and I work for the Montana State Historic Preservation Office of the Montana Historical Society. I'm here today to provide informational testimony regarding the Rialto Theatre that may be useful for your deliberations.

My office is the permanent repository for information on the state's historic buildings, structures, historic districts, landscapes, and archeology. With this massive information as comparison, I can say the Rialto Theatre in Deer Lodge is a unique, historical, and significant property, important not only to the people of Deer Lodge but to all Montanans. Built in 1921, the theatre is listed in the National Register of Historic Places because of its outstanding glazed brick and terracotta façade in the exuberant Beaux-Arts style that was popular for movie palaces between 1895 and the 1920s. The Butte architectural firm of Arnold and Van Hausen designed the theatre to accommodate movies and live stage productions. It continued to serve the Deer Lodge community in that capacity, including hosting the Statewide Preservation Conference in 2006, right up until November 4th. Despite the tragic fire, the Rialto Theatre remains worthy of preservation.

The State of Montana through the State Historic Preservation Office has provided both financial and technical support to the restoration of the Rialto Theatre.